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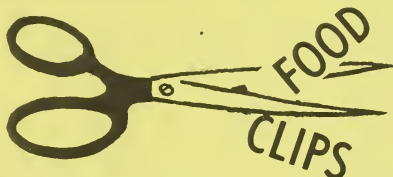


Food and Home Notes

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF INFORMATION WASHINGTON, D. C.

CATALOGING - PREP.

April 2, 1973



What do we mean by "Fancy"? That's U.S. Grade A (or U.S. Fancy) which means top quality, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture who defines specific levels of quality in canned and frozen fruits.

* * *

The sweetest, thickest sugar sirup used in canned fruits is called "extra heavy sirup." Canned fruits may be packed in light, heavy, or extra heavy sirups, in water, or in slightly sweetened water. The heavier the sirup, the sweeter the fruit and sometimes the higher the price.

* * *

What is graded fruit? U. S. grade name on a can or frozen package of fruit can help you decide how to use the fruit. Top quality is usually used for dessert or fruit salad for a company dinner. A Grade C fruit, for instance, would not be as sweet or as uniform in appearance--so would normally be used in puddings, jams, or frozen desserts.

* * *

Most frozen fruits are packed with dry sugar or sugar sirup.

WHAT TO—and HOW TO

—with Easter Eggs

If you're looking for the highest quality eggs—USDA Grade AA (Fresh fancy or A)—they are ideal for all purposes and recommended for use as hard cooked eggs to assure you of the best product. Size-wise you should look for extra large, large and medium—but you'll probably want a large-sized egg to decorate for Easter. Only eggs carrying the official USDA grade shield on the carton (or on the tape sealing the carton) have been packed under USDA supervision.

If you're hard cooking (no, we don't say "hard boiled", anymore) the eggs—gently lower them into boiling water, reduce the heat and bring water to simmering stage (just below boiling) for about 20 minutes. Do not let the water boil. Cool the eggs at once under cold running water. Remember, always cook eggs at a low temperature (and avoid overcooking) to prevent the green discoloration that appears sometimes between the white and the yolk of a hard cooked egg. (This results from a chemical reaction between sulfur in the white and iron in the yolk.)

If you've dyed the eggs (using one of the harmless food coloring dyes), store them in the refrigerator until Easter-basket-fixing time. Plan to eat the hard cooked eggs within one or two days—and keep the Easter basket (if eggs are in it) away from hot places like radiators or heat vents.

ALMOST

—ALL ABOUT

HAM

Ham is—meat from the hind leg of a hog—it may be fresh, cured, or cured-and-smoked. You can divide hams into two groups: those you must cook before eating, and those you can eat "as is."

Hams labeled simply "cured" or "cured and smoked" must be cooked to an internal temperature of 160°F. Because they aren't cured, cooked fresh hams look and taste more like pork roasts than what many people usually think of as "ham."

"Ready to eat" hams are fully cooked and canned hams are cooked thoroughly in processing and are usually ready to eat. If you prefer them warm, heat to an internal temperature at 140°F. The labels on some hams don't say whether the hams need to be cooked or not. U.S. Department of Agriculture meat inspectors suggest that you assume such hams must be cooked before eating.

If you don't buy a whole ham, you may buy a "butt half"—that's when it's cut in half, the upper, meatier, rounded half is marked "butt half." The lower, slightly pointed half is labeled "shank half." Sometimes the butcher removes the center slices between the shank and butt for separate sale as "ham steaks." When these slices are removed, the shank section is called "shank portion (or end)" and the butt section "butt portion (or end)."

Federal meat inspection regulations say hams must weigh the same after curing as before—if they weigh more because of water absorbed from the curing solution, they must be labeled "ham, water added." If the weight gain is more than 10 percent, the finished item must be labeled "imitation ham." Canned hams are allowed to gain up to 8 percent water during curing; if they gain more than this, they must be labeled "imitation ham." Sometimes a very small amount of dry gelatin—about one-fourth ounce in a five pound canned ham—is added (legally) before the can is sealed to cushion the ham during shipping. During processing,

natural juices cook out of the ham just as they do when you cook ham at home. These juices combine with the dry gelatin as the ham cools to form what may look like a "lot of gelatin." Gelatin is included in the net weight stated on the label.



Can ham cause food poisoning? Yes, if it isn't handled right, because ham, like all meat, naturally contains some bacteria. The one most often involved in ham-related illness is staphylococcus aureus, or "staph." Staph organisms themselves can't hurt you—they're in the air you breathe, on your clothing, in your nose and throat and skin. Under certain conditions, however, staph germs can multiply rapidly and produce a poisonous toxin. Eating food contaminated with this toxin can cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps and diarrhea. The illness occurs within 2-4 hours, lasts 1-3 days, but is rarely fatal.

Staph produce toxin at temperatures between 45-115°F. The real problems are that the toxin doesn't make the ham taste, look, or smell any different than normal and even thorough cooking won't destroy the toxin. So—don't let it form in the first place. How to prevent it? Follow good personal hygiene and sanitary practices when you handle food. Don't leave ham at room temperature for long periods. Keep it cold, 45°F or lower—or hot, 140°F, or higher—and for storing ham—refrigerate whole hams, no longer than 7 days; cured half hams, cured ham slices or fresh ham, no more than 3 to 5 days. Fresh ham may be kept in the freezer (0°F or lower) 4 to 8 months, but cured hams, no more than 1 to 2 months. Freezing is not recommended for cured meats, though, because it can change flavor and texture. Unopened canned hams, whether they must be refrigerated or not, should be stored no longer than 6 months. Once open, any canned ham should be refrigerated and used within 7 days.

WHAT'S IN A DOG? (Part two!)

If you commented on USDA's proposal earlier this year about what should go into hot dogs and other cooked sausages and how they should be labeled—or even if you didn't—now's your chance to comment again.

Why? Because the U. S. Department of Agriculture received so many varied comments that it has revised its original proposal. Under the new version, three categories of franks and other cooked sausage would be allowed:

...those made only with skeletal meat (including up to 15 percent poultry meat) plus the ingredients such as water and sweeteners needed for flavor and processing. Such products would carry their traditional names, such as "frankfurter" or "bologna".

...those containing these ingredients plus meat byproducts (sometimes called variety meats), such as hearts or tongues or spleens, and poultry products such as skin. Such a frank would have to be called a "frankfurter with byproducts." And each byproduct used would still have to be listed individually in the ingredient statement, as currently required.

...those made by either of these formulas plus up to 3.5 percent nonmeat binders such as nonfat dry milk or cereal, or 2 percent soy protein. These products would also have to carry special descriptive names—such as "frankfurters with byproducts, nonfat dry milk added"—and complete ingredient listings.

More than 3,200 comments on the original proposal were received by USDA. This would have set up only two categories and banned all use of byproducts in franks and other cooked sausage. Many strongly supported such a ban, while many others opposed it, indicating that byproducts contain good quality protein at lower prices and consumers should be able to buy such products as long as they are wholesome and accurately labeled.

Want to comment this time? Send your remarks (in duplicate, please) to the USDA Hearing Clerk, Washington, D.C. 20250 before April 17.

COMMENTS & INQUIRIES TO:

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